

Strong Neighborhoods Guide Series



City of Wilmington

Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Development

[MODULE 2: BUILDING STRONG CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS]

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Leadership Characteristics

Strong leadership is critical to the success of any organization. While there is no one organizational culture that is correct or better than any other, there are characteristics of strong leadership that transcend cultural differences. A strong leader is crucial to helping the group establish a shared vision and providing the direction to see that vision through to existence.

Think about the purpose and role of leadership in your civic organization. Reflect on the qualities and characteristics of a good leader and what their responsibilities should or might be.

- **Good listening skills:** Having the ability to let the ‘ego’ take a back seat and put the needs and visions of fellow members in the forefront; Good listening includes making sure everyone is heard and knows they are heard; Good listening includes knowing how to follow through with what you’ve heard; Being understanding and perceptive is a part of being a good listener; Respect is at the heart of good listening (not imposing your own ideas on their expressions).
- **Problem solver:** Leaders should be able to solve problems, or know where to look for solutions that are beyond their ability.
- **Delegating:** Having the ability to dissect projects/ problems into skill or task-related parts and allocate tasks to others best suited to them.
- **Knowing your neighbors:** Being active in the community as a whole, even outside of your own organization; Being willing to approach neighbors and groups who may seem disengaged is key to leadership.
- **Integrity:** People will not follow someone they do not perceive as trustworthy. A leader must be known to do the right thing, every time, without compromise.
- **Passion:** Be passionate about the cause. If a group perceives that their leader does not care, they will be less likely to engage.
- **Understanding the ‘big picture’:** Understanding the dynamics across neighborhoods, issues and other boundaries is important in order to contextualize issues and problems.
- **Knowing your organization’s membership:** This is important in order to creatively and fully utilize the interest and talents of those already involved; This knowledge assists leadership in delegation and leadership development within the group.
- **Positive Attitude:** Being able to ‘take the good with the bad’; Negativity is contagious and damaging; Positivity is contagious and powerful!
- **Being able to back-up and stand behind group members:**
- **Dedication:** A leader cannot do their job half-way. They must be dedicated to the cause and carry their task through to completion. This can be difficult, but pays dividends when the group is influenced by the dedication of their leader.
- **Confidence/ Self-Assuredness:**

****Keep in mind the importance of allocating leadership based on skills and experiences, as well as relationships**

Leadership Responsibilities

- **Delegating**: knowing the strengths of the group; allocating tasks to others accordingly. The leader cannot do it all on their own.
- **Empowering**: Members to try new skills and to rethink their own visions of themselves as leaders; in this way, members of the group can learn and grow.
- **Facilitating the Process**: A leader should be able to guide the group through processes and tasks the community decides to undertake.
- **Uniting the Entire Community**: Despite differences in life circumstances and experiences, a leader must galvanize disparate groups across the community.
- **Building Relationships with Key Stakeholders**: Relationship building with the police, elected officials, etc.
- **Program Management**: Guiding the process; Being able to enact follow-up and/or to know or find out who can help to follow-up through fruition of tasks.
- **Accountability**: To report back to all stakeholders progress, needs, next steps; stewarding transparency.
- **Recognizing/ Acknowledging the Team**: Being able to highlight the work and accomplishments of the group and individuals within the group
- **Succession Planning**: Stewarding the process of planning and training leaders coming up in the group; developing consensus about the skills and personalities necessary for the ongoing strength of the group; Being transparent about the process for consideration for elections, etc.
- **Leading efforts to recruit and learn from young community members**: Young people may not come forward as willingly and participate in civic and community affairs. Leadership should work with the young people they know to devise ways to bring younger community members out.
- **Being the conduit to make the group's vision real**: Balancing the desire to 'lead' with facilitating the desires of the group; Using leadership skills to refine separate agendas and unconnected projects
- **Using the gamut of communications channels for outreach, communication, etc.**: Newsletters, phone calls, flyers, partner resources, internet, email, etc.
- **Decision-Making**: The leader should work with the group to determine a decision-making model (Majority, Consensus, etc.,) and be sure outcomes always reflect the will of the community.
- **Team Building**: Do the members of your civic association know each other? A leader should give group members the opportunity to develop positive relationships with one-another, which will foster better working relationships and productivity in the future.
- **Communicating and Listening**: A leader should guarantee transparency by communicating clearly with the group and should guarantee inclusiveness by listening to all group members.

Relationships and Partnerships

An organization isolated from others is isolated from ideas, resources and opportunities. To strengthen your organization, consider building partnerships and relationships with the following potential partners.

Think about the ways your organization makes outreach to the community. Think about your organization in terms of what social groups are represented.

- **Police:** Police in the City of Wilmington will be attending civic and neighborhood meetings and look forward to working with your organization to not just respond to crime, but to prevent crime and enhance the neighborhood.
- **Elected Officials:** Sharing information about how elected officials are different from administrators and how to connect to each effectively toward the group's goals.
- **Local Businesses:** Conscientious business owners have a desire to 'give back' to the community. Local businesses have a stake in the quality of the neighborhood and should be part of your organization.
- **The City Administrators and Elected Officials:** (April 28th Cluster Meeting for the session where these will be in attendance)
- **Property Owners/ Landlords:** Communicate your organization's expectations; establish trust and accountability; engage them in community work at all levels (public safety, cleanliness/beautification, property values, etc.)
- **Faith-based Organizations:** Faith-based organizations have a history of being leaders in community development in the United States and can be valuable partners to any civic organization.
- **School Principals/ PTA Leadership:** The schools that serve your neighborhood or may be located in your neighborhood are important partners in ensuring young people have the greatest opportunities. Issues that impact your neighborhood likely impact the school and its pupils.
- **Nonprofit Service Providers:** Communicating your organization's desire to take advantage of opportunities to deliver services, be educated, advocate with you, etc.
- **QUESTION:** Is it feasible that Wilmington community organizations can engage/ partner with the County? The State? **ANSWER:** For some projects, the answer is yes. By all means, Community Leaders are encouraged to ask those questions and share those resources
EXAMPLE: The Attorney General's office will come to Wilmington neighborhood association meetings to share information about nuisance properties (302-577-8500 Dan Logan, Atty. Gen. Office)
- **NOTE:** It is key to have good relationships with ALL elected officials, not just those in office, in the party of your choosing and different jurisdictions (city, state, county)

Community Outreach

Consider the diversity of your organization? Is it representative of your entire community? Consider age, renters/owners, education, etc. The way you communicate within and outside the organization has a huge impact on membership and effectiveness. Consider the following.

- **Consider the challenges and expectations of neighbors at different phases of life.** What might be something good for a teen to help with vs. a more mature member? A student who is renting vs. an owner with school-aged children? Example: retired members will have more time to devote than those raising young children
- **QUESTION:** How do we keep individuals engaged who don't want to be involved unless their issue is among the top priorities? Where can we go for support with this?
SUGGESTION: Consider academic and/or nonprofit resources. Might there be other community organizations who have more resources in volunteer management? Some ideas: United Way, Big Bro/Big Sis, Wilmington Police Department, Wilmington Fire Department, etc.
- **QUESTION:** If Outreach & Recruitment are adversely affected by the culture of your group, are there ways to change the culture outside of elections? **QUESTION:** How can the organization harness the energy around specific incidents or issues? Once the issue is resolved or time passes, does momentum wane?
- **Establishing even casual, friendly relationships can be very helpful.**
- **Meetings need not be the main goal.** What's most important in outreach is Communication Techniques. Do you have a complete list of who lives in each home with a phone and or email? Is there a way to effectively communicate across neighborhoods and engage neighbors on a larger level?
- **Are there innovative methods to engage neighbors outside of meetings?** Events are a great way to get people out. Short bursts of activities that don't require large commitments of time are a good start. Porch Parties, Meet n Greets in parks with Council or other officials, Thank You events for your Community Police or Block Captains, Community Breakfast, etc.
- **Consider a Block-By-Block Method to engage participation:** Block Capitan Concept has been successful across the City because it engages neighbors around children and specific areas. Walking groups are great hubs to engage L&I in a broad conversation about the neighborhood, itself.
- **Consider High Schools** many of them have community service requirements and young people are often waiting for an opportunity to be involved. **Consider Parks & Recreation Summer Youth** to outreach to young people as well.
- **Police are your partner in outreach.** They not only have access to resources, they might also have relationships.

Communication

Communication is a key component of community outreach. With the rapid advances in technology of the last few years, there is a wide array of communication techniques and media that individuals use every day. Phone-trees and flyers now have to compete with email and text messages. The way you choose to communicate will largely determine who participates in your organization.

During meetings it might be useful to have someone taking notes to help the group stay focused, and also so that those members who were not able to attend can review any notes and be able to participate at the next meeting or event. Between meetings, it is important to keep a line of communication open to keep neighbors abreast of community issues. Make sure to select a system of communication that best fits the different types of members in your organization so that everyone feels included and able to contribute to group discussion.

- Nextdoor.com is a resource to keep neighbors connected in a way that is more private and controlled than Facebook. Nextdoor is meant to connect entire neighborhoods. Neighborhood Link is a regulated space on the internet. Nextdoor.com is a more advanced product similar to Neighborhood Link.
- **Facebook is a good way to start for the less tech-savvy. Settings can be set such that information can be seen, but no one can leave comments. Facebook can be used as a closed group not just an open page.
- Google applications are extremely powerful and work well with other programs. Consider creating Google group. – At least one neighborhood organization uses a Yahoo group to communicate.
- Many social media sites link to other social media sites and are capable of blasting messages from one site across others. Example: Twitter can be set to post automatically to Facebook. A blog can be set to post automatically to both.
- Communication should match the usage of residents. If the majority of residents in a neighborhood lack internet access, web-based communications likely won't work.
- Consider the communication assets in your neighborhood. If a church or business has a digital marquee, perhaps they would be willing to post a short message for your organization.
- If you plan to communicate often (and you should), you may want to include a communications officer or webmaster on your board. Managing communication can be daunting to an officer who already has many other tasks. This would be a good way to incorporate younger people in your organization – or give an established member an opportunity to learn a new skill!

Marketing

We know the value of your organization. Other neighbors might not get the picture yet. To pique the interest of neighbors who might otherwise not participate, you may consider the following marketing techniques.

- Establish a reasonable goal for whom and how many people you hope your efforts will recruit.
- **Have a clear message** for marketing that does not ask neighbors for anything. Create information pieces (newsletters, letters, and calendars). Provide a service.
- Commit to two methods of communication/ promotion you will always use, with a frequency. **Establish a calendar.**
- Can a collective of organizations make a more powerful impact on your message?
- **Claim your victories** as a way to promote what your organization is doing. If your organization accomplished something, put the organization's name on it. Toot your own horn!
- How do we find out what people's interests are so that we can 'target' their interests within our work? It may help to offer brief **evaluations** at events. You may not get lots of feedback, but it helps to include the opportunity via written evaluations. Use feedback from attendees to feed your marketing efforts. You'll have the chance to peer into the thoughts of members and newcomers; improve events and agendas; and learn what makes neighbors tick.
- **Branding** is the enduring 'look' or 'icon' your group uses to establish consistency in your message and your work. Logos, designated colors, etc. are easy ways to brand your group. This is a good way to engage the group by hosting a contest among neighbors. Your name should be on everything you do, using your 'brand.'
- **Other ideas** that can help bring neighbors together and market the neighborhood or the organization include: Welcome Committees help to market/ brand your organization to new neighbors; Acknowledging graduation dates, holidays, etc.; neighborhood contests and casual efforts like a walking club, dog walking group.

Resources

The following guides are the work of research and practice by experts in community development and organization building. We hope they will be helpful and provide you with ideas and practices that will help you and your organization.

Five Keys to Broad and Inclusive Community Engagement –

Author, Jim Diers

<http://www.neighborpower.org/papers/five-keys.pdf>

Tips on Building Partnerships –

Provided by NeighborWorks America, America's Stable Communities initiative

<http://www.stablecommunities.org/stabilization-planning/build-partnerships/tips-on-partnerships>